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ABSTRACT

After a brief examination of the concept of "quality of life," the paper explores research related to the concept in geography, the environmental education movement, and problems involved in implementing relevant programs. It is suggested that "quality of life" is a shifting concept. At a basic level it is concerned with conditions that make survival possible; as one moves up the income scale, the concept relates to various conditions which enhance the environment in a social and aesthetic sense. A brief overview of current related work in geography focuses on peoples' perceptions of natural hazards; a model, for decision-making purposes, to measure objectively the value of a landscape; and studies of general environmental processes. The section on environmental education points out that teachers of geography at all levels have begun to slant some of their work toward the objectives of environmental education with a goal of helping students develop an environmental ethic. Problems in implementing programs are noted: teaching about the quality of life involves a wide range of disciplines; a multi-disciplinary topic involves cooperation among teachers, departments, and students; and teaching about the quality of life may be considered an unnecessary luxury given the economic situation of the 1980s. (KC)

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GEOGRAPHY, AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE

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Introduction

Geographers have always been interested in what Vidal de la Blache called the "genre de vie" (style of life) of people and this to some extent subsumed the idea of the quality of life. Certainly the German school of Geography in the late 19th century, was concerned about landscape and therefore indirectly about its quality. Sir Dudley Stamp in the 1930s started his massive land-use survey of the United Kingdom as a result of a developing regard for the quality and effectiveness of the exploitation of land as a factor of production. American geographers in the 1920s and 1930s expressed the need to conserve resources, especially soil and vegetation as well as the more obviously exhaustible mineral resources. More recently in the 1960s and 1970s research undertaken on the perception of natural hazards has as its objectives the improvement of the quality of life of people living in areas subject to catastrophes, whether these be floods, hurricanes, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. The very development of the so-called welfare and humanistic geographies arises directly from a concern for people and the quality of their lives. This article will therefore begin by looking briefly at the concept of the quality of life. It will go on to examine the ways in which geographers have meshed into the concept through various aspects of research. Then the way in which geographers and geography teachers have become involved in the environmental education movement, will be described, as well as the problems of implementing a programme destined to develop notions of environmental quality and an environmental ethic.

The Quality of Life

This neat phrase with its appealing overtones, hinting at an idyllic existence somewhere in a pollution free, aesthetically pleasing sunny utopia nevertheless needs close examination. Is there a quality of life that we would all instinctively recognize and agree about? What are the components of this life? Who decides whether the quality of life is good, bad or indifferent? Are there fundamental cultural differences which lead to very different perceptions of the quality of life? Does an Indian have similar perceptions to those of a Japanese?

Perhaps there are certain aspects of this elusive concept that we would agree upon and others that would be so strongly culturally determined that agreement would be difficult. Let us try flying a few kites. Would a universal aspect of quality, be a life that was relatively healthy and free from the kinds of diseases and ill health that plague the poorer citizens of the world? This would involve a life in which basic foods were available in sufficient quantity so that the likelihood of the diseases of malnutrition was small. It would probably also be a life in which certain basic tenets of hygiene were respected. Would this also imply that standards of housing would need to be such that hygiene was a possibility: with clean water supply, drainage and easy to clean surfaces? Clearly all this relates to the physical conditions which make life relatively trouble free rather than to the positive aspects of the quality of life. I am referring here to the concept of an aesthetically pleasing environment; to atmospheric conditions in the environment; to the nature of interactions between people within the environment; to the kind of relationships between people and nature.

But what is an aesthetically pleasing environment, whether rural or urban? Is it the neat but irregular rural semi-cultivated environment of the Essex countryside in the United Kingdom or the rectilinear patterns of the Middle West in the United States of America? Do we enjoy the Georgian urban landscapes of Bath or the neo-classical buildings of Aix en Provence because we have been conditioned to appreciate them rather than the Sydney (Australia) suburbs? I suspect that such aesthetic appreciation of landscapes are to a large extent culturally determined in the widest sense of term, so that tastes are developed within a culture or sub-culture. What has been called Kitsch (garden gnomes, Disneyland features, hamburger stalls in North America) is a style of building which clearly appeals to a group of people (Relph, 1976). Does Kitsch therefore add to the quality of life? Are there absolute standards of aesthetics which we can impose on people?

Turning to atmospheric conditions, we can probably agree that we all prefer a pollution free atmosphere and that the quality of life in Los Angeles is diminished by its smog. But what of atmospheric conditions in summer on the western coast of Norway compared with those on the Southern coast of France? Is that aspect of the quality of life measurable on any scale? And how does it mesh in with other aspects of the environment: the forests and moors of Norway compared with the garrigue and pine woods of Southern France?

To a large extent the quality of life is influenced by the nature of our relationships with people which depend on such intangibles as the social ambience. These social relationships as well as people's relationship to the rural environment depend on attitudes which develop slowly within a cultural setting. Whether one looks upon landscape as a resource to be plundered, or a living organism with which we are to live in harmony, depends largely on the attitudes that individuals within a society develop, and the subtelty of the understanding that people have of the relationships between population, economic well being and environment. Clearly in a society where population levels are low, an exploitive attitude may not do much damage to the environment. But a similar attitude by a large population may be lethal to the environment. Consider the effect of the "slash and burn" technique of shifting cultivation in certain parts of Nigeria where vegetation and soils regenerate after cultivation is abandoned, with areas in the Sahel where overgrazing in a semi-desert environment leads to the destruction of both the vegetation and the underlying soils. Also, an uncaring application of modern technology may have a similar effect. Thus developments in the tropical rain forest in Brazil whether in the building of highways or the exploitation of bauxite may have destructive effects on the local ecosystem (Cooper 1981).

To summarize, I would argue that the concept of the quality of life is a shifting one. At a basic level it is concerned with the conditions which make survival possible for certain people. As one moves up the income scale, the concept becomes more complex and relates not only to welfare in an economic sense, but to all kinds of conditions which enhance the environment in a social and aesthetic sense. It is in such a high income context that the contradictions of economic development and environmental quality are most felt.

Geographers and the quality of life

I have deliberately labelled this section "Geographers and the quality of life" and not "Geography and the quality of life" since it is individual members of the community of geographical scholars who have undertaken work on this theme. Without attempting to go back to the various origins of this work to which I have already alluded in the opening paragraph, I shall give a brief résumé of current work in the field, which is of some significance.

First, a broad area of research which goes under the name of natural hazards research. This arose out of geographers' traditional concern for the relationships between human beings and their environment. In its present form the research started in the United States of America initiated and subsequently fostered by Gilbert White (Parker and Harding 1979) who was working on flood plain inhabitants' perceptions of flood hazards and the kinds of adjustments that individuals and communities made to these hazards. In general it was found that the perceptions of those living or working in flood plains were somewhat wide of the reality. They

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adjusted to the situation by denying the hazard or by calling it an "act of God". There appears to be few significant associations between the degree of perception of flood hazards and such variables as age, sex, occupation and educational attainment. Clearly, the greater the experience of floods, the more likely is the individual or the community to take action to adjust to the situation. Similar research has been carried on the perception of earthquakes in the Friuli area of Northern Italy by Robert Geipel (1977). This is an area of research which is currently being used by local authorities in areas prone to natural disasters. It is also being considered in geography classes for the 16-19 age range. Ashley Kent (Schools Council 1980) has developed a teaching unit for the Schools Council Geography 16-19 Curriculum Development Project entitled Hurricanes and Man which examines human perceptions and adjustments to the dangers associated with hurricanes. Kates (1971) has devised an Adjustment Process Control Model shown in Figure 1., which attempts to analyse the decision making process when a community and managers are faced with taking decisions in the light of a natural hazard.

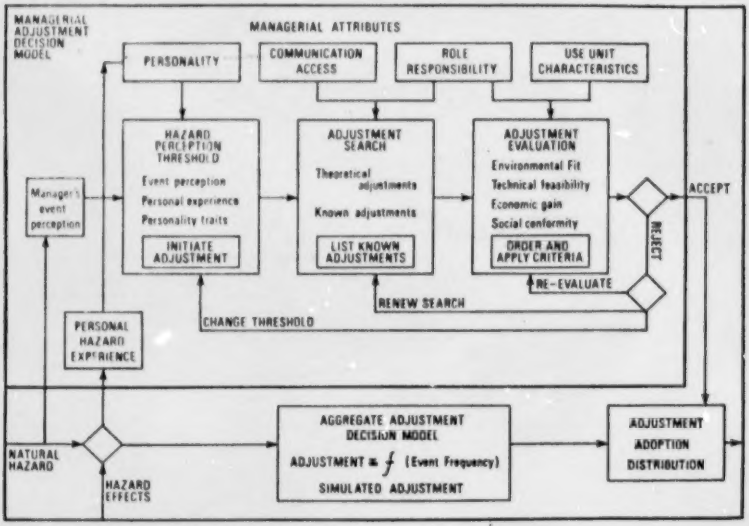

Figure 1

The factors affecting an individual manager's decisions are detailed, those affecting the group decisions are not.

Another aspect of geographical research concerned in part with quality of life is that which relates to landscape evaluation. To some extent the research has arisen for sound practical reasons, namely the need under

planning legislation in the United Kingdom to delimit National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or in urban areas the need to decide whether buildings should be preserved or could be knocked down. Thus various techniques have been experimented with to attempt to measure "objectively" the value of a landscape. These techniques tend to employ a components approach in which various aspects of the visible landscape; relief, waterbodies, vegetation cover and human artefacts are enumerated and given points. The problem of course lies in deciding how many points to give to each feature; this tends to depend on the personal preference of the evaluator. An alternative procedure would be to get a sample of representative individuals to rate different types of landscapes according to a given scale, thereby obtaining both individual and aggregate views on landscape preference which may be used in decision making. The problem lies in the lack of any underlying theory of the aesthetics of landscape value. Appleton (1975) has suggested that landscape appreciation may have pre-historic sources. In the "prospect, hazard, refuge" theory he argues that perhaps the source of our liking for distant views of relatively open landscape but from a position where shelter is available, refers to a period in our ancestral past when, to be able to see danger coming from a vantage viewpoint offering a refuge if necessary, was valuable for our survival. This theory, however, fails to explain how such a view of landscape came to be translated into one of aesthetic appreciation. Another aspect of this research lies in the study of the behaviour of people in so called wilderness areas and their preferences for certain characteristics: tranquility, 'natural' vegetation, excitement of rocky relief or waterfalls and rapids and so on. Some of these characteristics are mutually exclusive, hence the need to provide for different tastes in wilderness parks (Gold 1980).

Geographers have also contributed substantially to research of a scientific kind on general environmental processes. Some of this is summarized in Scope Report No. 10 (Holdgate and White 1977). Examples include: man's impact on climate, drought problems, the effect of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere on the temperature levels within the atmosphere and therefore on associated phenomena, like rainfall and vegetation growth. Thus the quality of life would be considerably affected if, as some predict a diminution of the temperature gradient between the poles and the equator reduced the strength of winds and the amount of moisture which found its way into the interior of continents. Clearly the relationship between crop yield and climatic change is another aspect of research which could yield important information particularly for the quality of life in the third world, where crop yields tend to be low. Similarly research has been extensive on urban climates which help to define the quality of the urban environment. London (U.K.) tends to be 1.3°C higher in annual mean temperature than the surrounding countryside. Wind effects caused by high buildings in cities tend to affect the quality of life for those moving about at ground level. Thunderstorms may be more frequent over urban areas than over the surrounding countryside. A summary of such research may be found in

Goudie's (1981) "The human impact." In general it could be argued that geographers have become involved in research concerned with the quality of life incidentally but that in so doing they have become more and more conscious of the value of that concept, even if lacks a precise definition.

Geographers and environmental education

The use of the term environmental education is, in educational history, a relatively recent one. It was seldom used prior to the 1960s. It was coined both in the United States and in the U.K. to describe the kind of educational activities whose purposes were (i) to make people more aware of the nature of the environment and the ecological relationships within it and (ii) to develop caring attitudes for this environment. A generally accepted definition today is the one given by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in 1970:

> "Environmental education is the process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man, his culture, and his bio-physical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision making and self formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality."

Clearly geographers with their general concern for man-environment relationships found themselves involved, with biologists, chemists and physicists, in the environmental education movement. This meant in practice that teachers of geography in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions began to slant some of their work towards the objectives of environmental education. For example, urban field work which might have, at one time, been concerned with positivistic relationships (e.g. height of buildings in relation to distance from city centre and or rateable value), now tends to be concerned also with the aspect of the urban environment, that is its aesthetic qualities, with the impact of traffic on environmental quality, with the level of environmental noise and ways of minimizing this. Similarly in classroom work, emphasis may be placed on the development of positive values towards the environment by processes of value clarification. For example, an issue such as closing a national or regional park to motor traffic might be debated in light of knowledge of the physical conditions of the park, the amount of motor traffic normally passing along the various roads in the park, the activities of people visiting the park and so on. It would involve the students in clarifying their own values about the purpose of such parks and the kind of environmental conditions which contributed to the quality of life there (Martorella 1977). The hope ultimately is that students will develop an environmental ethic, with which they look upon environmental decisions, and therefore come to question rather than accept the status quo or proposals for change. This involves both teachers and students in areas of the curriculum which are not traditionally scientific, but relate to art and ethics. A useful source of ideas on environmental education is the journal B.E.E. (Bulletin of Environmental Education) published by the Town and Country Planning Association in London.

Problems and Possibilities

It is easier to write about geography and the quality of life than to put into effect a programme of environmental education. While I have no doubt that such endeavours are worthwhile, the difficulties of implementation cannot be shrugged aside (Cribb 1981). In the first place, teaching about the quality of life involves teacher and student in a wide range of disciplines some of which may be relatively new to the teacher. The ramifications of ethical judgments are not always readily appreciated by those whose basic training has been in natural science. The shifting sands of aesthetic evaluation may not commend themselves to a teacher-whose concept of the environment derives from studies in geology and geomorphology. In the second place a multi-disciplinary topic involves cooperation between teachers, between departments and between students — something which is not always easy to achieve. Thirdly, the social climate may be such that teaching about the quality of life is considered an unnecessary luxury given the harsh realities of economic life in the developed world in the 1980s and in the developing world at all times.

In England, the Secretary of State for Education and Science has issued a statement on the School Curriculum (DES 1981a) which sees education in schools as having essentially instrumental aims directed to producing employable young workers. It is fair to state, however, that another arm of the D.E.S. has also produced a booklet Environmental Education: a review (DES 1981b).

In spite of these difficulties, the possibilities are wide open, for the question of maintaining and even enhancing the quality of life on our planet is a momentus one. Geographers are more and more conscious of their responsibilities in this area and they are developing strategies for teaching *about* environmental problems and *for* positive attitudes to environmental quality. They are not qualified to deal with the inter-personal aspect of the quality of life which they are happy to leave to psychologists and sociologists. But they can begin to develop among students an environmental consciousness which may lead to action being taken to tackle certain fundamental environmental issues.

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